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## Grassy Top tract to expand Jones Gap State Park

Naturaland Trust donates 305 acres to extend Jones Gap park

By Mike Foley • Staff writer • Published: November 23, 2010 2:00AM

Christmas came early for Greenville-area residents as a large land donation immediately expands Jones Gap State Park by 305 acres and has the potential to double that amount.

Greenville's Naturaland Trust said Monday it has given the state 305 acres of prime mountain land as an addition to Jones Gap State Park. The acreage includes Grassy Top Mountain, the state's 11th tallest summit, at 3,268 feet.

Perhaps even more important than the \$1.8 million gift, however, is what it means as a way to protect even more mountain lands. Currently, the Nature Conservancy is working to raise money to buy 85 acres adjacent to the donated tract.

The Nature Conservancy has a June 1, 2011, deadline to raise \$561,000 to buy the 85 acres — called the Jones Gap Expansion Project — from the White family.

The Nature Conservancy already has acquired more than 200 acres of land, and if it can raise money for the additional 85 acres, it will donate the entire 300 acres toward more Jones Gap expansion.

"The park is going to get a beautiful section of land," said Kristen Austin, project director for the Nature Conservancy. "This is a great area for people to get that wilderness experience close to Greenville."

In addition to the 600 acres, Naturaland Trust has completed a conservation agreement to protect the Asbury Hills Methodist Camp at the base of Caesars Head State Park, said Frank Holleman, president of the Naturaland Trust.

The \$1.8 million land donation from Naturaland Trust serves as a match for a grant from the South Carolina Conservation Bank, which funded the conservation easement placed on the 1,892-acre Asbury Hills tract.

"Tommy Wyche had been working for years and years to achieve a conservation agreement on that land," Holleman said. "Finally the (Methodist) board agreed to do it, and this donation makes it all possible."

The conservation easement allows Asbury Hills to continue to operate but protects the property forever from development.

Before the recent donation, Jones Gap State Park covered 3,346 acres. The park was largely acquired from land owners from 1976 to 1986.

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